



## **Engineering Services Division Summary of 2004 Focus Group Meeting Feedback**

Between the months of April and September, Engineering Services conducted eight Focus Group meetings with the development community. The meetings are part of the division's outreach and continuous improvement programs. Started in 2002, this is our second round of Focus Group meetings and we intend to repeat our visits on a biennial cycle. The meetings focus on the division's performance in areas of primary responsibility: preliminary and final construction plan review, construction inspection, and processing of final site plans and final plats. At the meetings great ideas surface and we also have the opportunity to share recent improvements and how we are addressing issues of concern.

The Focus Group meetings target mixed groups of developers, architects, planners, engineers, surveyors, contractors, and other development support specialists such as realtors and title insurance companies. They were held at eight local engineering firms and included 35 individual stakeholders (down from 110 in 2002). Appendix A provides a listing of participants.

The meeting format was purposely informal in an effort to create a comfortable atmosphere conducive to an open exchange of information. While this proved a successful approach, the lack of structure resulted in feedback that covered a broad spectrum of issues rather than a collective assessment of any one issue.

Most of the comments expressed came from single individuals and at times comments made at one focus group meeting contradicted feedback received at another focus group meeting. Many comments related to work managed not by Engineering Services but by other divisions within the Community Development Department or by the Public Works Department. In many cases issues of concern pertain to areas outside staff control or that are not limited solely to the performance of staff but to that of the stakeholders as well. Because of this, it is difficult to weight the feedback and prioritize which issues need attention most. Grouping comments into like themes can give some indication of trends in popular opinion. For the 2006 Focus Group meetings we will consider options for structuring the meetings to yield more definitive guidance.

Comments and feedback were grouped into 4 major themes: Working Relationships, Access to Information/Staff, Process and General and are summarized in the following section. When the same or similar comment was shared by more than 1 of the 35

stakeholders participating, a notation in parenthesis follows the comment indicating how many individuals concurred. Included in the feedback are what is working well, areas of concern and suggestions for improvement. Following the feedback is a summary of actions taken between the 2002 and 2004 Focus Group meetings and actions planned. Singular comments were synthesized into general comments attributed to each theme. Only comments from more than one individual are bulleted below.

#### **Feedback on what the development community likes:**

**Working Relationships** – Working relationships and responsiveness were identified as improved:

- Really enjoy working with review engineers; they are great (4)
- Engineering Team Leader's flexibility and win/win attitude in solving challenging problems (4)
- Clerical staff very responsive (2)

**Access to Information/Staff** – Communications, outreach, records management and quality of information were identified as improved:

- More and better access to information via web site and fax - application handouts, forms, Tidemark reports, performance reports, etc. (2)
- Access to Engineering Team Leader for meetings to discuss project issues and documentation in permit tracking system of agreements reached (2)
- Communications are straight forward and professional; vastly improved (2)

**Process** – Quality, consistency and timeliness of technical reviews are improved and appreciate expedited review for priority economic development projects:

- Meetings with reviewers to discuss first review redline comments (2)

**General** - Code is mostly understandable and straight forward and overall service has improved

#### **Areas of concern expressed by the development community:**

**Working Relationships** – Staff attitudes need to be positive or cooperative

**Access to Information/Staff** – Would like staff immediately available by phone or for meetings and all calls returned

**Process** – Would like line staff to take on more decision making authority, be consistent in interpreting conditions of approval and catch all items on 1<sup>st</sup> review:

- Sometimes information requests seem excessive (2)

**General** – plan review redline comments need to be clear

## **Suggestions for improvement included:**

**Working Relationships** – Extra care in communications could avoid misunderstandings

**Access to Information/Staff** – Advance notice of process changes would be appreciated:

- Standard details need a few tweaks; provide updates on web page (2)

**Process** - Pre-submittal meetings would be helpful and ease review, continue to look for ways to streamline the plan review process and consider inviting stakeholders to become sounding board for process changes:

- Require greater level of engineering detail at preliminary design to avoid questions of feasibility at final design and ensure fair representation is given to public at time of preliminary approval (2)

**General** – **Keep design review as predictable as possible through timelines and consistency; would appreciate an accurate fee calculator to avoid checks for incorrect amount:**

- When updating application forms, need grace period to accommodate work already completed under old format (2)

## **Actions Taken:**

In the 2002 Focus Group meetings we heard that the stakeholders were pleased with greater access to staff and information, proactive problem solving approaches, improved communications and responsiveness and enhanced consistency. What they wanted to see more of was even greater accountability, faster service, more predictability and more flexibility.

To address this input the Engineering Services Division has undertaken numerous changes:

- Conducted separate Contractor Focus Group Meetings and produced summary
- Developed standard construction details
- Enhanced the Tidemark computerized permit tracking and reporting system
- Enhanced internal coordination through management reports, hand off briefings, weekly project coordination meetings and Customer Service education program
- Improved customer access to information through Tidemark Fax on Demand system, the Hot Plat and Hot Site Plan Status Reports, our web site and outreach efforts
- Continued staff training on development trends and development-related topics
- Developed and implemented performance measures including cycle times for plan review
- Developed professional services on-call contracts
- Added Case Management approach for those projects requesting more intensive processing service

- Began update process for FEMA floodplain mapping
- Qualified for FEMA Community Rating System resulting in 15% premium reductions for policy holders
- Refined technical tools that allow staff to speed engineering and technical analyses
- Trained engineering subject matter specialist in the Customer Service Division and implemented “By Appointment” submittal intake process to reduce wait times for engineering submittals
- Re-engineered the final plat and final site plan processes to address customer feedback for greater predictability in process timelines and ability to appeal decisions.
- Developed and are implementing a strategic plan to address organizational and operational improvements in the area of development inspection
- Added a Construction Manager to focus on improvements to enhance consistency, predictability and efficiency in the area of development inspection and provide relief to the Engineering Team Leader of an inspection support role so he can focus on engineering review process improvements
- Developed a 90-day expedited review and permitting process for priority economic development projects
- Improved plan approval letter and checklist application for inspection cases
- Added layer to GIS system which has inventory of storm infrastructure to help applicants and staff.

#### **Actions Planned or Underway:**

- Conduct Contractor Focus Group Meetings & produce summary
- Develop and implement plan review checklist to enhance consistency
- Develop and implement consultant contract to update Standard Details
- Use management consultant contract to develop plan to continue improving internal communications and work flow
- Initiate use of computerized survey program for streamlining review of right-of-way dedications
- Conduct systems overhaul in inspection programs to streamline internal processes (inspection records management, maintenance warranty, etc.)
- Complete inspectors’ conversion to lap top computers to facilitate data collection and retrieval in the field
- Allow grace period for submittals when transitioning to updated handouts and application forms
- Improve liaison with Public Works to facilitate the plan review process on capital construction projects
- Develop and implement Division Strategic Plan that focuses on making changes to increase the Division’s success and create a better working environment for both customers and staff

Exhibit A  
Engineering Services  
2004 Focus Group Meeting Dates & Attendees

April 30	Harb Engineering (4)	Bryan Halbert Dan George Gus Harb Karyn O'Reilly	Schlect Construction Planning Solutions Vision Land Management
May 7	Harper, Houf, Peterson, Reghellis (3)	Chuck Harper Chris Robertson Randy Stark	
May 13	WRG (5)	Jesse Nemec Kristi Crippen Chris Negelspach Bob Headrick Ben Williams	
June 10	Harker Engineering (5)	Norm Harker Ott Gaither Tony Plescia Dave Biehn Brad Thompson	G & S Construction Vancouver Land Universal Construction Thompson Brothers
June 11	OTAK (5)	Doug Nichols Don Proctor Shane Cline Jim Neighorn Bob Vaught	ESD 112
July 7	MacKay & Sposito (6)	Al Schauer Henry Diaz Don Moe Cecelia McClure Bob Sable Tim Schauer	
July 14	Olson Engineering (3)	Peter Tuck Chris Wonderly Kurt Stonex	
September 30	Hopper, Dennis, Jellison (4)	Brian Hopper Tom Dennis Andrew Gunther Stacey Shields	